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BUDDHISM II. IN ISLAMIC TIMES

BUDDHISM

ii. In Islamic Times

The Muslim conquerors of eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and Transoxania in the mid-8th century found Buddhism flourishing in a series of prosperous trading communities along the old caravan routes to India and China. Descriptions of rich monastery complexes have been preserved in the reports of Hsüan Tsang, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who traveled west between 629 and 645 (Beal, pp. xviii-xix), passing through Qočō (Kučā), Termeḏ, Balḵ, Bāmīān, Kāpiśī, and number of Gandharan sites on his way to India (ibid., pp. 19-24, 38-39, 43-48, 49-68). Modern excavations have confirmed the existence and wealth of Buddhist communities along the Great Silk Route. Aside from the painted cave complexes in the Tarim basin and Turkestan, Bāmīān, Šotorak, Fondūqestān, and Haḍḍa are among the sites that have yielded the most extensive Buddhist remains (see, e.g., Godard et al.; Hackin, 1933, 1940; Meunié; Barthoux). By the 5th/11th century, however, Buddhism had so thoroughly disappeared from eastern Iran and Afghanistan that Bīrūnī, usually a reliable reporter on religious minorities, was able to pass on only the most confused and fragmentary information: “Before the establishment of their rites and the appearance of Būḏāsaf people were *šamanī*s, inhabiting the eastern part of the world and worshiping idols. What remains of them now is to be found in

India, Ṣīn [China], and Toḡozḡoz [eastern Turkestan]. In Khorasan people call them *šamanān*, and their monuments, the *bahār*s [from Sanskrit *vihāra*; see below] of their idols, and their *farḵār*s [from Sogdian *βṛγʾr*, an adaptation of *vihāra*, which it also renders in translations of Buddhist texts; Gauthiot, pp. 52-59; Gershevitch, p. 54, par. 362 with refs.; MacKenzie, pt. II, p. 208] can be seen in the border areas between Khorasan and India" (*Āṯār*, p. 206; cf. Bīrūnī, *Āṯār*, tr. Sachau, pp. 188-89). Ḵʷārazmī (4th/10th cent.; *Mafātīḥ al-ʿolūm*, ed. G. van Vloten, Leiden, n.d. [1895], p. 123) mentions that *buhār* designates idol houses in India, and *farxār* idol houses in China and Sogdia.

Descriptions of Buddhist monuments and rites in eastern Iran and Afghanistan are recorded, though not explicitly identified as Buddhist, in early Islamic historical sources. The most famous such monument was the shrine at Balḵ known as Nowbahār (from Sanskrit *nava-vihāra* "new shrine," a derivation that has long been recognized). In the 4th/10th century detailed descriptions were provided by Ebn al-Faqīh (pp. 322-24) and by Yāqūt, who spent many years in Marv (*Boldān* IV, pp. 817-20), both drawing on a single 2nd/8th-century source. Sir Henry Rawlinson noted in 1872 that the monument described by Yāqūt must have been a Buddhist *nava-vihāra* (pp. 510-11), which was confirmed by V. V. Barthold (*Turkestan*[3], p. 77; *EI*[2], s.v. "Barāmika"). P. Schwarz pursued some of the implications of this description in 1933 (pp. 439-43). Both Yāqūt and Ebn al-Faqīh sought to explain the monument and the rites performed there as inspired by the Kaʿba and the Islamic pilgrimage; this explanation was clearly suggested by the description of a domed structure around which Buddhist worshipers performed circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*), which would have immediately reminded a Muslim observer of the *ṭawāf* around the Kaʿba. Ebn al-Faqīh added that "the kings of Ṣīn and the *Kābolšāh*" were Buddhists and "went there on pilgrimage." Other rites, as well as architectural characteristics, which had no parallel in Islam, were also faithfully noted. The circular arcades (*arweqa mostadīra*; Ebn al-Faqīh, p. 323, *Boldān* IV, p. 818) mentioned in both 4th/10th-century texts probably represented the kind of blind arcade (still called *rewāq* in modern Afghanistan) commonly articulating the double drums of stupas. In another passage the draping of silks on the shrine and the attachment of banners (*aʿlām*) to the cupola are recorded (Ebn al-Faqīh, p. 323; *Boldān* IV, p. 818). Banners were indeed placed on early Buddhist stupas (for contemporary representations in the wall paintings from Kakrak and Bāmīān, see Bussagli, pp. 39, 124; for fragments of such banners excavated at Buddhist sites along the Silk Route, see Stein, II, pp. 840-45 and passim). Yāqūt also noted that the

worshipers at Balḵ “fixed” idols to the shrine, which agrees with archeological evidence from stupa sites, where large carved buddhas and boddhisattvas and smaller stucco images were attached to the walls. Yāqūt glossed *nowbahār* as “new *bahār*,” explaining that it was customary at Balḵ to “crown” important buildings with fragrant plants upon completion. The first plant to appear in the season was chosen. At Balḵ it happened to be the *bahār* (a plant with yellow flowers that blossoms in the spring, see, e.g., Lane, I, p. 266); hence the name Nowbahār. Other writers left briefer notices or descriptions of this monument. In 372/982-83 the usually sober and terse author of *Ḥodūd al-ʿālam* mentioned “the wonderful works in dilapidated condition called Nowbahār” (ed. Sotūda, p. 99). In the late 15th century Nowbahār still stood, in ruins but with some of its frescoes remaining; it was known locally simply as *bahār* (Asfezārī, I, p. 155). In early Persian poetry there were frequent metaphorical references to this shrine. On the other hand, there is some evidence that the pre-Islamic meaning of *nowbahār* as a certain type of shrine was retained until the 5th/11th century; Gorgānī, for example, used the word as a common noun (p. 56). Today no fewer than ten villages in the Mašhad-Nīšāpūr area are called Nowbahār (Razmārā, *Farhang* IX, pp. 423-24); in Afghanistan there are two Nowbahārs, one near Andarāb and another near Farāh (*Qāmūs-e joḡrāfīāʾī-e Afḡānestān* IV, p. 132). According to Jovaynī (ed. Qazvīnī, I, p. 76) the name Bukhara is still another version of *bahār*, or *baḵār*.

Although the fame and splendor of the structure at Balḵ would account for repeated references to it in Persian literature, the occasional mention of less well-known monuments leaves no doubt that there was a general, if somewhat confused, awareness of Buddhist structures. In the 11th-century *Garšāsb-nāma* there is a verse about the “shrine of Sūbahār,” which has “the pleasantness of the spring (*bahār*)” (as quoted by Enjū Šīrāzī, II, p. 2023; differently Yaḡmāʾī’s *por negār* “full of paintings,” p. 255). In another reference the author associates the shrine with the *bod-parastān* (Yaḡmāʾī, p. 245). Two other unusual monuments, the gigantic stone Buddhas carved out of the cliff at Bāmīān, were known to geographers and poets (*Ḥodūd al-ʿālam*, p. 101; Samʿānī, ed. Margoliouth, II, p. 64; Enjū Šīrāzī, I, p. 1018; II, p. 1808) as *sorḵ-bot* “red idol” and *ḵeng-bot* “white idol.” The exact identity of these images was unknown to medieval writers, however. In dictionaries they are said to represent two lovers, and it is mentioned that they were made before Islam by “polytheists” (*mošrekān*; Enjū Šīrāzī, I, p. 1019). Popular stories about them became the subject of a treatise by Abū Rayḥān Bīrūnī (Saʿīd Khan, p. 74), and a lost *maṯnawī* entitled *Ḵeng-bot wa Sorḵ-bot* (ʿAwfī, *Lobāb* II, p. 32) by Abu’l-

Qāsem Ḥasan ʿOnṣorī Balḵī (d. 431/1039-40). The theme lived on in the works of later poets, such as Ḵāqānī Šervānī and Sūzanī Samarqandī as an image dimly remembered from ancient times.

These lingering memories of Buddhist structures and idols—the word *bot* is probably derived from *buddha*—were paralleled in Persian poetry by an array of clichés celebrating idealized beauty. For example, the *bot-e māhrūy* (the moon-faced idol) is described as having a face round as the full moon, eyes shaped like almonds below arched brows, and a tiny carnelian mouth; the body is said to be "silvery" (*sīm-tan*). Asadī Ṭūsī quotes in his dictionary the following line by Abu'l-Maṭal Boḵārī to illustrate the meaning of *farḵār* or *bot-ḵāna* "temple of an idol" (*Loḡat-e Fors*, ed. Horn, p. 122); "My idol (*bot*) came alive; its monk became inanimate/Here I am a monk to it with my house as its *vihāra*." The metaphor presents the beloved one as a beautiful idol into which life has been breathed, while the lover is rendered inanimate as he is overcome with emotion. In an elaborate variation on this theme Manūčehrī celebrates a garden that has become like a monastery (*bot-ḵāna-ye farḵār*), where the roses are like idols and the birds like monks (*šaman*), whose soles the roses/idols would seem to be kissing (Biberstein Kazimirski, p. 8; Manūčehrī, p. 1). At a fairly early date, however, the word *bot* came to mean not only an image of the Buddha but also more generally "idol" and to be associated with the theme of the "beautiful Turk" (see bot). The resemblance of Turkic facial types to the idealized moon face with narrow eyes of late Buddhist sculpture may have encouraged the fusion of these poetic metaphors. Often the idol is related to places that literary and archeological evidence prove to have been Buddhist centers, as in *bot-e Balḵ* "the idol (Buddha) of Balḵ" (Farroḵī, pp. 166-68), *bot-e Qandahār* "the idol of Gandhara," *bot-e Čīn* "the idol of Turkestan," *bot-e Barbar* "the idol of Barbar" (the highlands around Ḡazna, where the Hazāras of Jāḡūrī were still called Hazāra-ye Barbarī at the turn of the century; Melikian-Chirvani, 1974, pp. 42, 43, 47). In the 5th/11th-century romance *Varqa o Golšāh* (ʿAyyūqī, pp. 67, 115), Qandahār is one of two geographical areas associated with the *bot*, the other being Čīn. Neẓāmī (d. 605/1209) wrote: "He saw in it a *bahār* as beautiful as the Nowbahār/A worshiping place by name of Qandahār" (p. 200). Kashmir is similarly associated with *bot* in early poetry. Awareness of Buddhist sculpture may also be reflected in references to the idol maker (*botgar*). In the 6th/12th century the poet Mahsatī wrote, "The image of the idol of tin is shamed by thy breast/The idol maker [himself] could never make thy portrait at Čegel" (*Dīvān*, p. 55; quoted in Jājarmī, II, p. 1163).

In the Iranian world and its periphery the memory of Buddhism thus seems to have been crystallized at the time of the Islamic conquest in the 2nd/8th century, and some writers seem to have been ignorant of the realities behind their references. As would be expected, it was the poets of the Ghaznavid court (ʿOnṣorī, Farroḵī, Manūčehrī, and later Masʿūd-e Saʿd) and the northeastern districts (Nāṣer-e Ḵosrow from Badaḵšān and later Sayf-al-Dīn Esfarangī), the parts of the Iranian world where Buddhism had flourished before the coming of Islam and survived until Bīrūnī's time (see above), who most frequently used Buddhist imagery. Among the most evocative examples are these lines of ʿOnṣorī (p. 260): "Smiling rose, the *bahār* dweller [idol] is shamed/For you bring better colors than the *bahār* [spring] and its roses/The Qandahār image does not have sweet lips/But thou, sweet-lipped one, art a Qandahār image." As late as the 6th/12th century ʿOṯmān Moḵtārī, a poet from Ḡazna, wrote this line (quoted in Enjū Šīrāzī, II, p. 214, and ʿOṯmān Moḵtārī, p. 8): "As long as the gem owes its splendor and value to light/As long as the world in spring becomes like the idol in the *bahār*." In the late 9th/15th century Jāmī still referred to "the Buddhist shrine of Čīn and Čegel" (p. 627).

Although indigenous Buddhism thus seems to have effectively disappeared from the Iranian world shortly after the Islamic conquest, in the late 7th/13th century an imported version flourished briefly under the Mongol Il-khanids. Initially, at least, all faiths were tolerated within the Mongol empire (barring such practices as offenses against Mongol customary law), and the "religious classes"—Buddhist lamas, Christian priests and monks, and Islamic *qāżī*s and *ʿolamāʾ*—were exempted from the poll-tax, on the understanding that they prayed for the imperial family.

Representatives of minority religious groups, moreover, served as a useful instrument of Mongol rule over a hostile majority of the subject population: in Iran, Buddhists benefited from the il-khans' favor, along with Christians and Jews. The first il-khan, Hülegü (Hūlagū; 654-63/1256-65), had been entrusted by his brother, the Great Khan Möngke, with the protection of certain Tibetan Buddhist sects while he was still in Mongolia and is known to have maintained contact with them after his arrival in Iran (Petech, pp. 182-83). Possibly, therefore, Tibetan lamas—or *baḵšī*s, as they were known—accompanied him. It is unlikely that Hülegü himself became a Buddhist, but the sources testify that he was under the influence of lamas (e.g., Kirakos Ganjakeči, pp. 237-38), and he built Buddhist shrines in Iran (Rašīd-al-Dīn, III, Baku, p. 90; cf. Mīrḵᵛānd, V, p. 330). Like his father, Abaqa (663-80/1265-82) welcomed *baḵšī*s

at his court, and their position does not seem to have suffered even with the succession of his brother, the Muslim Aḥmad-Tegüder (Takūdār), in whose reign we find *baḵšī*s along with shamans serving as investigating magistrates (Rašīd-al-Dīn, III, Baku, p. 172; *Tārīḵ-e ḡāzānī*, p. 46). It was Abaqa's son Arḡūn Khan (683-90/1284-91), however, who furthered Buddhist interests most assiduously. Temples were built, estates were granted to followers of the Buddha, and Arḡūn himself relied on the advice of the *baḵšī*s; he died as the result of a drug prescribed by one of them. Arḡūn's son Ḡāzān, who had been reared as a Buddhist on the orders of his grandfather Abaqa, built temples (*bot-ḵānahā*) at Ḵabūšān while governor of Khorasan on Arḡūn's behalf (Rašīd-al-Dīn, III, Baku, pp. 295-96, 373-74; *Tārīḵ-e ḡāzānī*, pp. 78, 166). Nevertheless, it was Ḡāzān who, with all his dignitaries, finally converted to Islam on his accession as il-khan in 695/1295 and began the suppression of Buddhism in Iran. The temples were destroyed and following unsuccessful efforts to impose Islam on the lamas they were allowed to leave the country for their original homes in Tibet, India, and Kashmir.

Rašīd-al-Dīn himself, in preparing his universal history, the monumental *Jāmeʿ al-tawārīḵ*, relied on a Buddhist monk at the Mongol court who had been summoned to Tabrīz from Kashmir to assist in producing Persian translations of texts relating to the life of Śākyamuni (Jahn, pp. 9-12). In one fragmentary manuscript of this work copied in his lifetime (714/1314), episodes from the life of the Buddha are among those illustrated (Gray, pp. 33-35, pls. 25-27); although the influence of Chinese pictorial conventions is clear in these miniatures, it is equally clear that the artists did not copy specifically Buddhist originals but rather devised their own imagery to accompany the text (cf. the illustrations of Buddhist events in an 8th/14th-century illustrated copy of *Āṯār al-bāqīa*; Soucek, 1975). Occasionally Buddhist motifs appear in Il-khanid courtly art, but their original symbolism seems to have been lost in the borrowing (see, for example, one miniature from the Demotte *Šāh-nāma* in which a *cintāmaṇi*, is visible on the back of ZÎʷaḥḥāk's throne; Blair and Grabar, pp. 58-59, pl. 1; Soucek, 1980). Nor do the many Persian copies of Buddhist motifs in the albums at the Topkapı Sarayı in Istanbul have apparent religious content (Sugimora, chap. 2 et passim).

Bahār. Buddhist *vihāra* seems to have survived in the place-name Šāhbahār (cf. Taddei, p. 110 with n. 6). For instance, there was a Šāhbahār in the Kabul area that according to Yaʿqūbī (d. 284/997; *Boldān*, pp. 390-91) contained an idol and was destroyed by fire by the Barmakid Faẓl b. Yaḥyā b. Ḵāled b.

Barmak in 176/792 (cf. Gardīzī, p. 129; Ebn al-Aṯīr, p. 114). Gardīzī (p. 186) and Bayhaqī (p. 334 and elsewhere) mention a Dašt-e Šāhbahār around Ḡazna in the first half of the 5th/11th century, which, as suggested by A.ʿA. Kohzād, may have been part of the Buddhist complex excavated by the Italians at Tepe Sardar (see also Taddei, pp. 109-24).

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